

Overweight Crisis in Yongsan!

This is as urgent as a three alarm fire! The children in Yongsan are overweight at an alarming rate! The Departments' of Pediatrics and Nutrition Care, of the 121 General Hospital, looked at the BMI's (Body Mass Index) of just under 1000 children, 5 to 15 years of age in the Yongsan area. What they found is truly alarming. Over 33% of the school aged children were either over weight or at risk for being overweight. Overweight is defined as having a BMI of 95% or greater on the growth chart, while at risk children are those with a BMI of 85% or greater. According to Dr. Meza-Valencia, Chief, Department of Pediatrics, "Being overweight places these children at risk for developing all sorts of adult diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and liver disease, not to mention poor self-esteem and depression." Dr. Meza-Valencia goes on to say, "What is also concerning is that when you compare our results to the National averages, Yongsan children are worse. Data published by the National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that in the United States, 30% of children are either overweight or at risk for being overweight where in Yongsan that number is 33%. When we take a closer look we see that Yongsan boys are even worse off with 41% either at serious risk or already overweight.

What is the Cause? Registered Dietitian, MAJ Lori Sydes says, "Being overweight is due to an imbalance between your food intake and energy expenditure. Today's children have almost constant and immediate access to high calorie foods that provide little nutritional value. Couple that with an increasing sedentary lifestyle and we have a recipe for disaster. For our children's health to improve we, as a community, need to take action now."

What Should Be Done?

For starters we need to eliminate the high calorie, low nutritional value foods from the snack bars. In fact, many states are passing legislation banning such foods from school premises. Secondly we must demand that our restaurants on post offer fruits and vegetables as well as non fried entrees for children's menu choices. Thirdly, we must continue to encourage physical activity for our youth. Making physical education mandatory for all grades year round is one way. Also encouraging after school activities involving intensive physical fitness has been shown to improve children's BMI and their overall health. Finally parents need to lead by example by eating healthy and staying physically fit.

Working together we can make a difference in Yongsan's youth. For more information contact the Nutrition Clinic at 121 GH at 737-5521 or for a online resource go to: <http://www.kidsnutrition.org>